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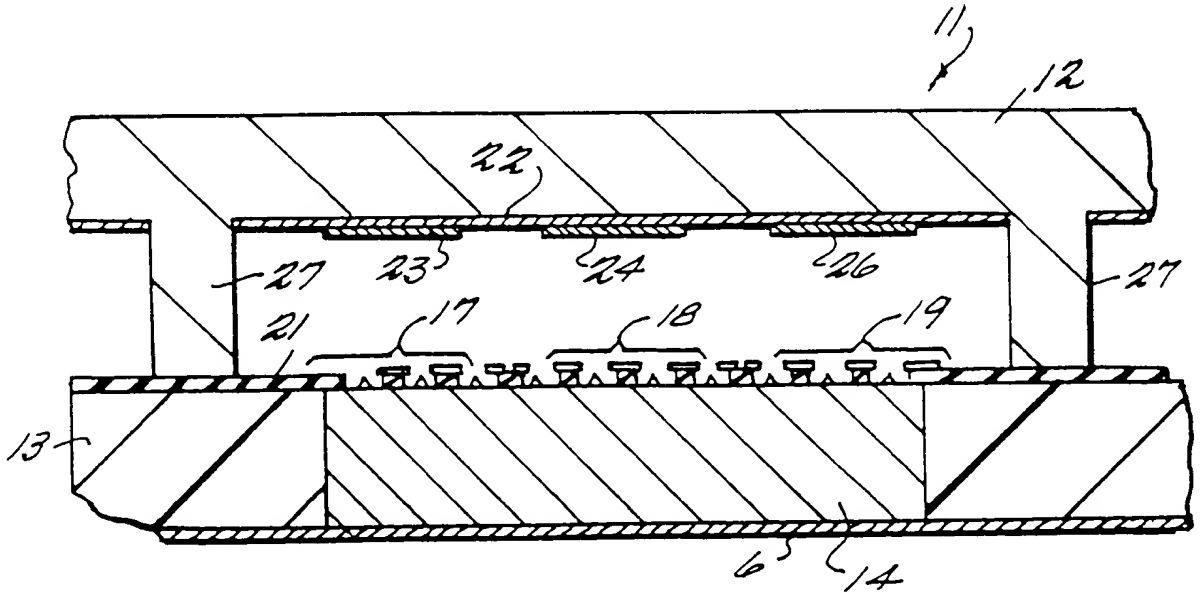
(54) Title: MATRIX-ADDRESSED FLAT PANEL DISPLAY



(57) Abstract

A matrix-addressed flat panel display, utilizing cathodes of the field emission type. The cathodes are incorporated into the display backing structure, and energize corresponding cathodo-luminescent areas on a face plate. The face plate is spaced 40 microns from the cathode arrangement in the preferred embodiment, and a vacuum is provided in the space between the plate and such cathodes. Electrical connections for the bases of the cathodes are diffused sections through the

MATRIX-ADDRESSED FLAT PANEL DISPLAY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to flat panel displays and, more particularly, to a matrix-addressed flat panel display utilizing field emission cathodes.

Cathode ray tubes (CRTs) are used in display monitors for computers, television sets, etc. to visually display information. This wide usage is because of the favorable quality of the display that is achievable with cathode ray tubes, i.e., color, brightness, contrast, and resolution. One major feature of a CRT permitting these qualities to be achieved, is the use of a luminescent phosphor coating on a transparent face. Conventional CRTs, however, have the disadvantage that they require significant physical depth, i.e., space behind the actual display screen, making them large and cumbersome. There are a number of important applications in which such requirement is deleterious. For example, the depth available for many compact portable computer displays and operational displays preclude the use of CRTs as displays. Thus, there has been significant interest and much research and development expended in an effort to provide satisfactory so-called "flat panel displays" or "quasi flat panel displays" not having the depth requirement of a typical CRT while having comparable or better display characteristics, e.g., brightness, resolution, versatility in display, power requirements, etc. These attempts, while producing flat panel displays that are useful for some applications

not discuss the importance of preventing a gaseous breakdown or avalanche from occurring in the interelectrode space, nor how to inhibit the same. Moreover, it is believed that a practical flat panel display made in accordance with the teachings of the Crost et al patent will exhibit significant distortion on the screen, in view of deflection of the transparent face due to the force of atmospheric pressure on the evacuated structure. The issue of electrical isolation between adjacent cathode bases in the array also is not addressed.

A significant feature of the instant invention is that the spacing between the luminescing means and the cathodes is selected to be equal to or less than the mean free path of electrons at the pressure in the interelectrode space. This close proximity significantly reduces the probability of a gaseous breakdown or ionization avalanche. That is, it significantly reduces the probability of ionization of gas molecules in the interelectrode space which could lead to such a breakdown or avalanche.

The invention further includes an electrical connection structure for each of the pixels which enables the desired matrix-addressing with the minimum interelectrode spacing associated with field emission type cathodes. That is, the bases of the cathodes extend through the backing structure to distribute the electrical connections required outside of the sealed, evacuated environment, thus facilitating electrical contact between the cathodes and the drive electronics. This is particularly advantageous in a flat panel display having a cathode array because of the large number of cathodes and close spacing between them. An important aspect of this arrangement is that steps

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

Reference is made to Figs. 1 through 4 for an understanding of a preferred embodiment of the flat panel display of the invention. A simplified representation of the preferred embodiment is generally referred to by the reference numeral 11. It includes a transparent face plate or structure 12 and a backing plate or structure 13. A matrix array of cathodes is provided between the backing and face plates. Each of the cathodes consists of an array of field emitter tips with integrated extraction electrodes of the type described in, for example, U.S. Patent Nos. 3,665,241; 3,755,704; and 3,791,471, (all of which name Charles A. Spindt as an inventor). Three of such cathodes are incorporated in each pixel, one for each of the three primary colors - red, green and blue.

The manner in which such cathodes are incorporated in the preferred embodiment of the invention is best illustrated by Fig. 2. In this connection, one advantage of utilizing field emission type cathodes is that they can be directly incorporated into the backing plate, one of the plates which define the vacuum space. The preferred embodiment being described is designed for chromatic displays and, pursuant thereto, as aforesaid each pixel includes three separate cathodes. The backing structure 13 can be of a semiconductive material, such as silicon, and the three cathodes of each pixel are provided with a common base 14 which is an electrically conductive section extending through the backing structure and provided by, for example, standard diffusion or thermal migration (a form of

structure 12. As a general rule, each color element will include one to several hundred of such tips depending on the size of the display and the resolution desired - for practical reasons a true representation of the same could not be included in the drawing. An electrically conductive gate or extraction electrode arrangement is positioned adjacent the tips to generate and control electron emission from the latter. Such arrangement is orthogonal to the base stripes and includes apertures through which electrons emitted by the tips may pass. There are three different gates 17, 18 and 19 (see Fig. 3) in each pixel, one for each of the primary colors. As best illustrated in Fig. 2, gates 17 - 19 are formed as stripes to be common to a full row of pixels extending horizontally as viewed in Fig. 2 across the front face of the backing structure. Such gate electrodes may be simply provided by conventional, optical lithographic techniques on an electrical insulating layer 21 which electrically separates the gates of each pixel from the common base.

The anode of each pixel in this preferred embodiment is a thin coating or film 22 of an electrically conductive transparent material, such as indium tin oxide. The anode for each pixel covers the interior surface of the face plate, except for those areas having the spacers described below.

Phosphor-coated stripes 23, 24, and 26 providing the primary colors are deposited on the layer 22. Each of such stripes opposes a respective one of the gate stripes 17, 18 and 19 and likewise extends for a plurality of pixels.

A vacuum is provided between the location

structure 13 on the insulating layer 21. Such legs provide support throughout the area extent of the face and thus assure that the vacuum within the space between the electrode gates and the phosphor stripes will not result in deleterious distortion of the face plate.

The matrix array of cathodes is most easily activated by addressing the orthogonally related cathode bases and gates in a generally conventional matrix-addressing scheme. The orthogonal relationship of the base and gate drives is schematically represented in Fig. 1 by diagrammatic blocks 28 and 29. (Three flow lines extend from the gate drive block 29 to the display whereas only one is shown extending between the base drive block 28 and the display, in order to illustrate their relationship, i.e., there are three gates to be individually energized for each base.)

Fig. 4 illustrates blocks 28 and 29 incorporated into a standard matrix-addressing scheme. A serial data bus represented at 31 feeds digital data defining a desired display through a buffer 32 to a memory represented at 33. A microprocessor 34 also controls the output of memory 33. If the information defines an alphanumeric character, the output is directed as represented by line 36 to a character generator 37 which feeds the requisite information defining the desired character to a shift register 38 which controls operation of the gate drive circuitry. If, on the other hand, the information defines a display which is not an alphanumeric character, such information is fed directly from the memory 33 to shift register 38 as is represented by flow line 39.

Timing circuitry represented at 41 controls

similar to the previously described embodiment are referred to by like reference numerals.

While the invention has been described in connection with preferred embodiments thereof, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that various changes can be made without departing from its spirit. For example, although preferably the features of the invention are incorporated into a cathode-luminescent flat panel display having cathodes of the field emission type, they are applicable to other kinds of flat panel displays. Gates 17 through 19 also may be driven from electrical connections which are diffused or extend through the backing structure 13. Moreover, although a specific addressing technique and circuitry are described, it will be appreciated that the invention is equally applicable to other matrix-addressing arrangements. It is intended that the coverage afforded applicant be defined by the claims and the equivalent language and structure.

including apertures through which electrons emitted by said tips may pass; and

C. a first electrical insulating layer electrically separating said base from said gate.

4. A flat panel display according to claim 3 wherein said base drive means is electrically connected to the bases of said array to individually energize a sequence of said bases defining one of a plurality of first paths; and said gate drive means is electrically connected to the gates of said array to individually energize a sequence of said gates defining one of a plurality of second paths crossing said first plurality of paths.

5. A flat panel display according to claim 4 which is a chromatic display and wherein each pixel thereof includes three cathodes having bases which are physically separated from one another.

6. A flat panel display according to claim 2 wherein the interelectrode spacing between said cathodes and said electrically conductive means is equal to or less than the mean free path of electrons in said interelectrode spacing.

7. A flat panel display according to claim 3 wherein said first electrical insulating layer is a solid dielectric.

8. A flat panel display according to claim 1 wherein said backing structure is of a

bombardment by electrons emanating from said cathodes by emitting visible light, which luminescing means includes electrically conductive means for attracting electrons;

E. electrical drive means for energizing selected cathodes in said array;

F. a vacuum in the interelectrode space between said array of cathodes and said conductive means electrically insulating said array from said conductive means; and

G. the distance between said array and said conductive means being equal to or less than the mean free path of electrons at the pressure in the interelectrode space.

13. A flat panel display according to claim 12 wherein each of said individually addressable cathodes includes:

A. an electrically conductive base at said backing structure having a multitude of spaced apart electron emitting tips projecting therefrom;

B. an electrically conductive gate positioned adjacent said tips to generate and control electron emission therefrom, said gate including apertures through which electrons emitted by said tips may pass; and

C. a first electrical insulating layer electrically separating said base from said gate.

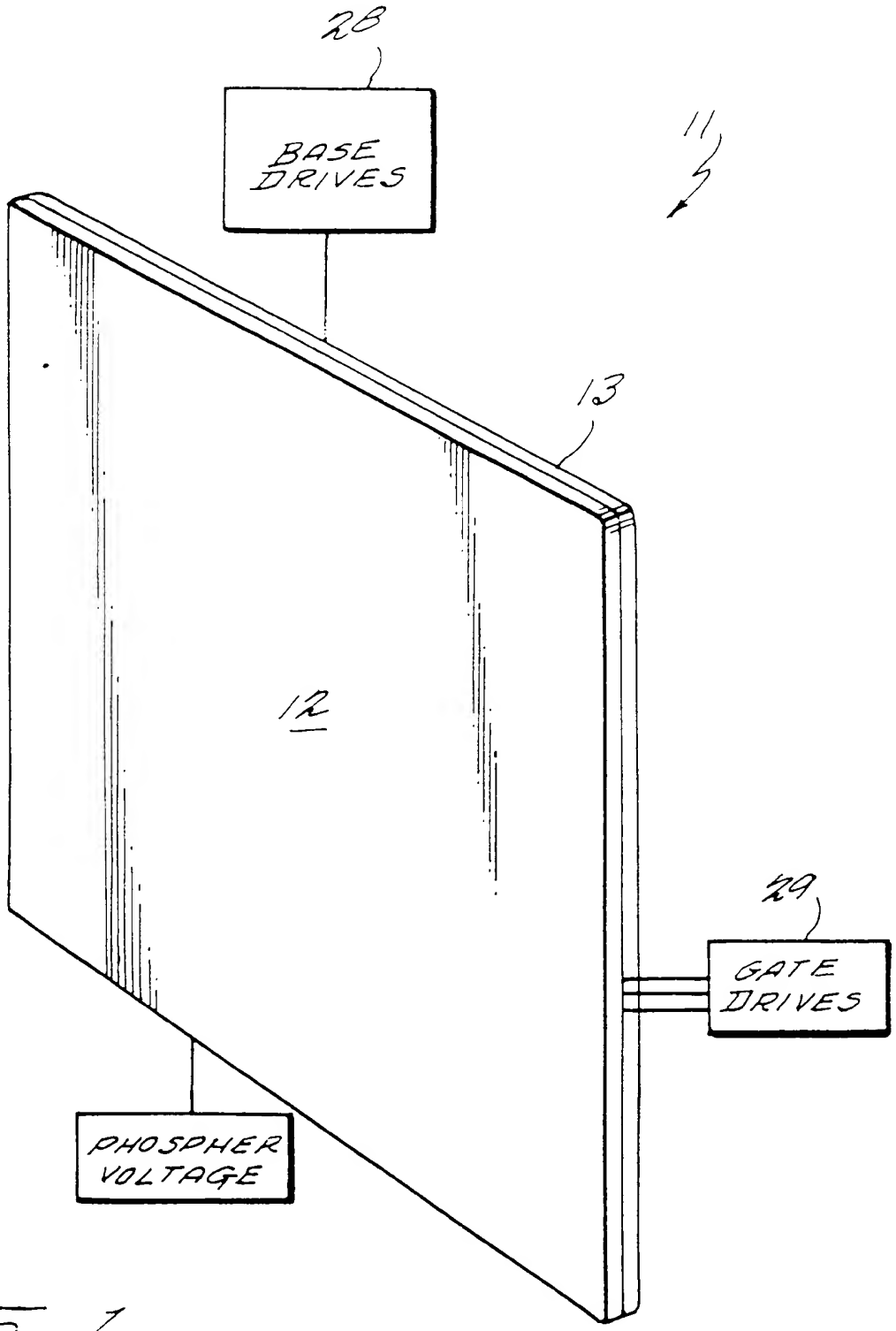
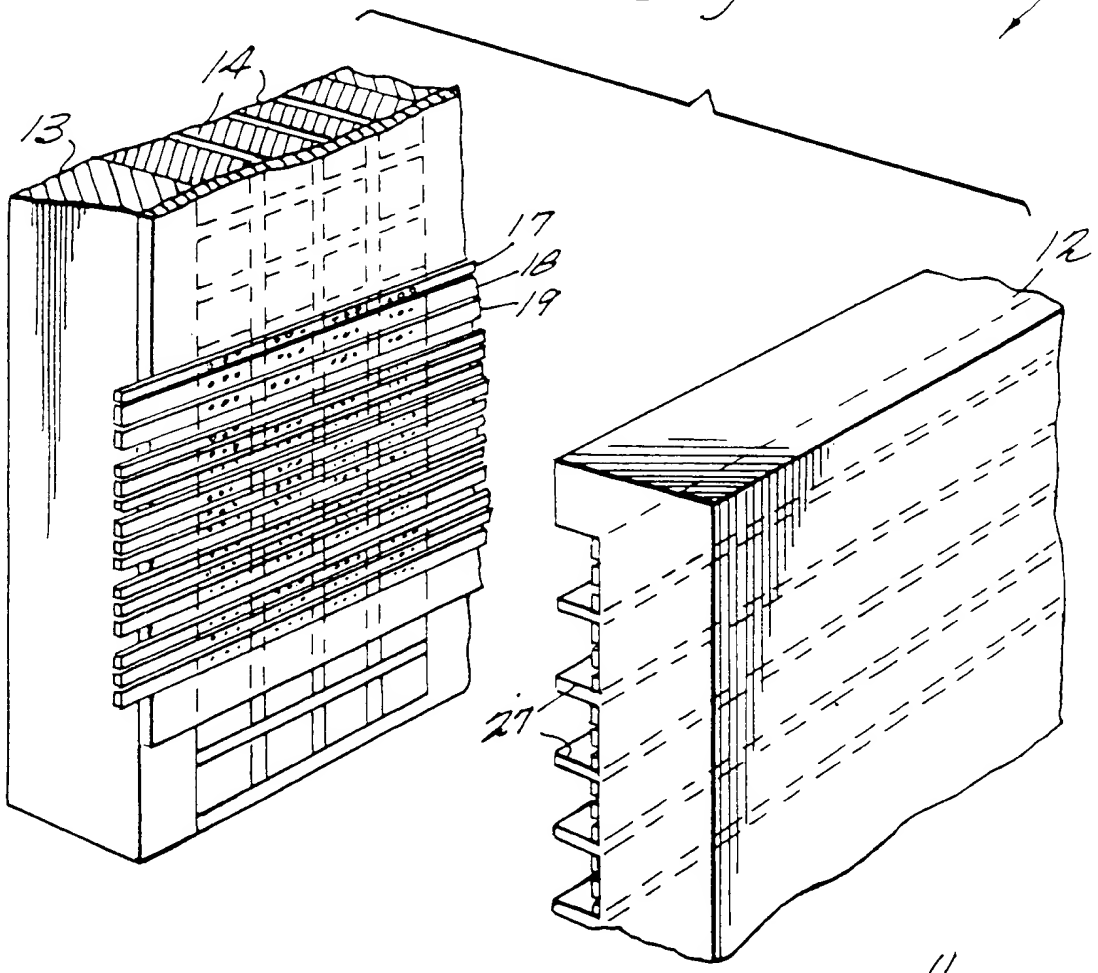


Fig. 1

Fig. 2



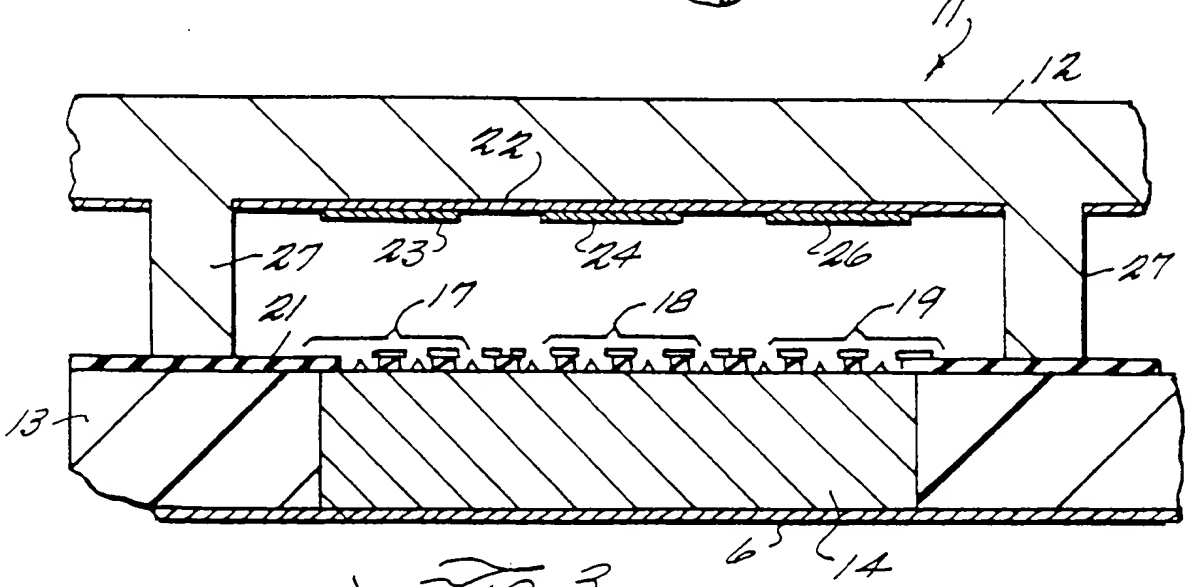
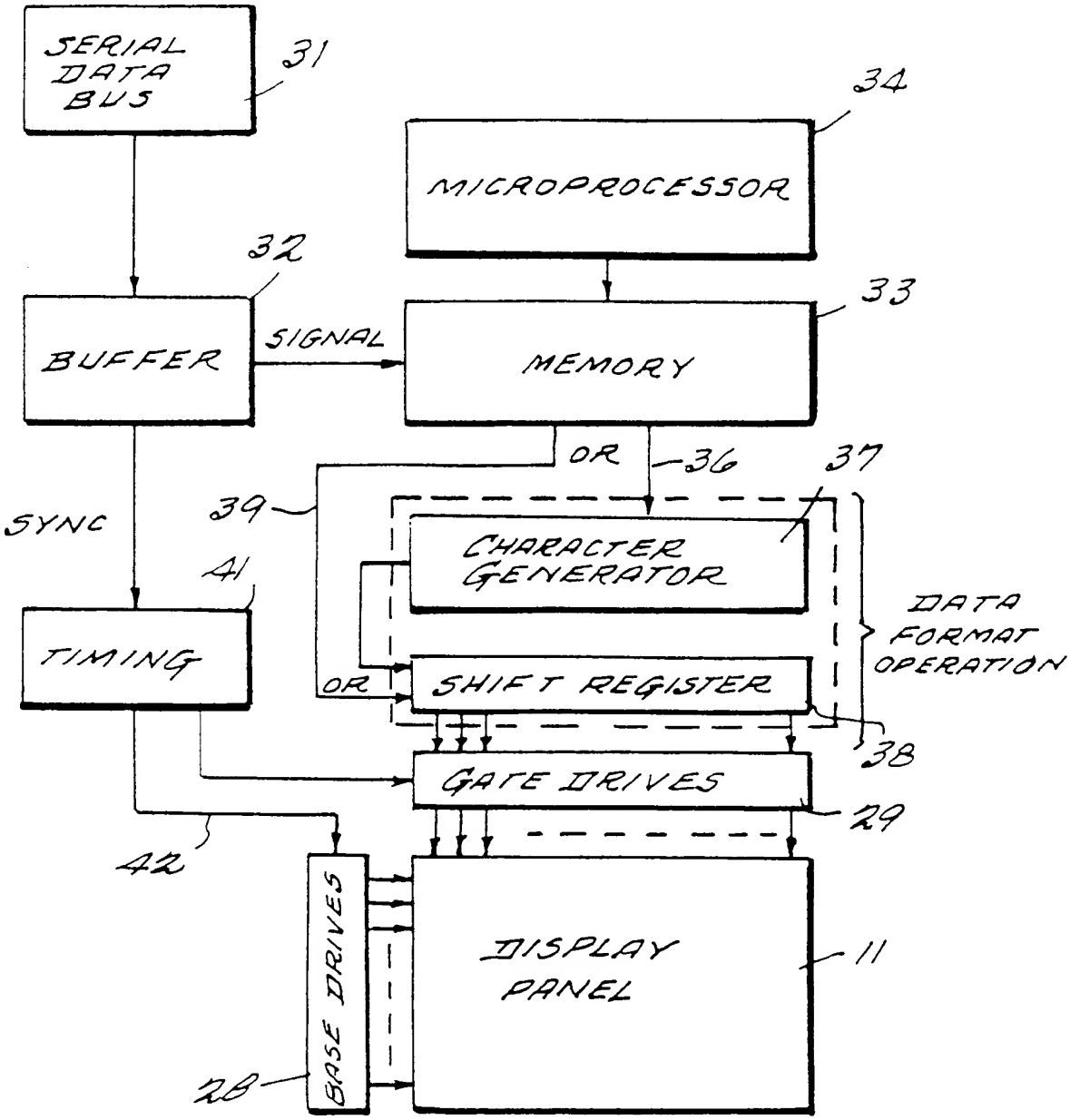


Fig. 3

Fig. 4


SERIAL DATA BUS
31
34
MICROPROCESSOR
32
BUFFER
SIGNAL
MEMORY
33
OR
36
37
39
SYNC
CHARACTER GENERATOR
41
TIMING
DATA FORMAT OPERATION
OR
SHIFT REGISTER
38
GATE DRIVES
29
42
BASE DRIVES
DISPLAY PANEL
11
28

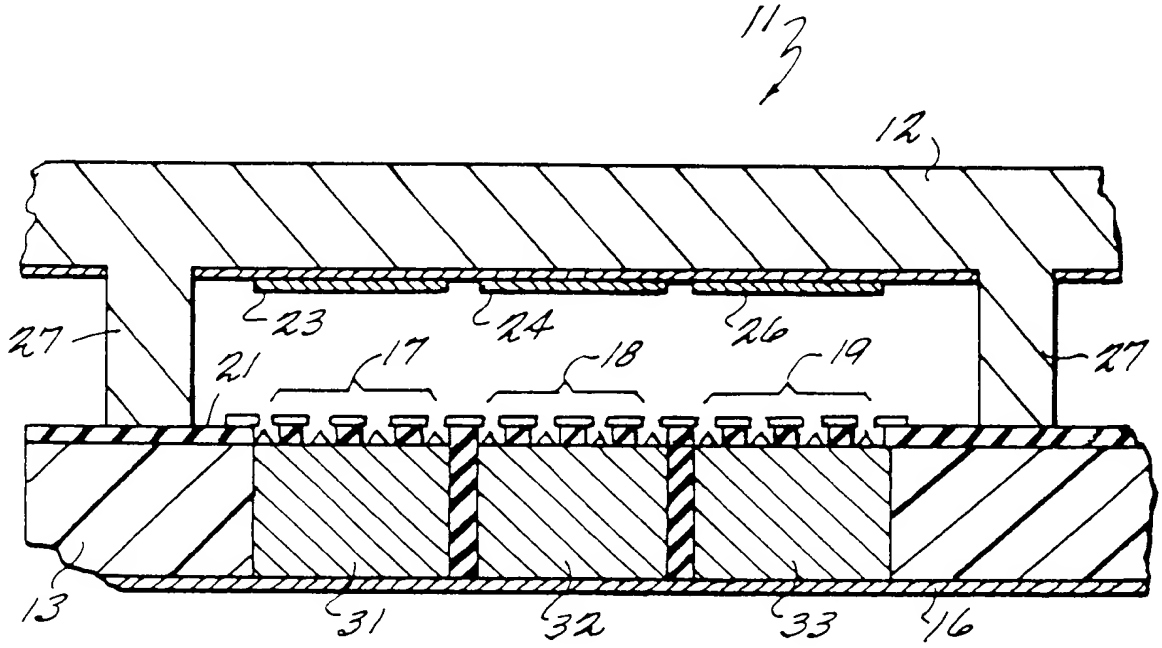


Fig. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No PCT/US 87/01747

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (if several classification symbols apply, indicate all) [6]

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC

IPC[4]: H 01 J 31/12

II. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum Documentation Searched [7]

Classification System	Classification Symbols
IPC[4]	H 01 J 31/00

Documentation Searched other than Minimum Documentation to the Extent that such Documents are Included in the Fields Searched [8]

III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT [9]

Category *	Citation of Document, [11] with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages [12]	Relevant to Claim No. [13]
A	EP, A, 0172089 (COMMISSARIAT A L'ENERGIE ATOMIQUE) 19 February 1986 see claims; figure 3	1,12
A	FR, A, 2536889 (MAN MASCHINENFABRIK AUGSBURG-NÜRNBERG) 1 June 1984 see claims	1,12
A	Electronics, volume 59, no. 24, 16 June 1986, (New York, US), R.T. Gallagher: "Flat-panel display built that could compete with CRTs", page 18 see whole article	1,12
A	EP, A, 0155895 (LABORATOIRE D'ETUDES DES SURFACES, MARSEILLE) 25 September 1985	
A	US, A, 3665241 (SPINDT et al.) 23 May 1972 cited in the application	

* Special categories of cited documents: [10]

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"&" document member of the same patent family

IV. CERTIFICATION

Date of the Actual Completion of the International Search	Date of Mailing of this International Search Report
11th November 1987	11 DEC 1987
International Searching Authority: EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE	Signature of Authorized Officer: M. VAN MOL